

True Blood: Race, Science, and Early Adventist Amalgamation Theory Revisited | BY RONALD OSBORN

In her 1864 book, *Spiritual Gifts: Important Facts of Faith in Connection with the History of Holy Men of Old*, Ellen White writes that much of what we see in the natural world is the result of what she describes as “the base crime of amalgamation.” Her enigmatic words, long understood by Seventh-day Adventists to refer to perverse but somehow scientifically possible sexual unions across diverse species, including humans and other creatures, became a source of anti-Adventist polemics from the moment they first appeared in print. They remain among the most perplexing lines the prophetess ever

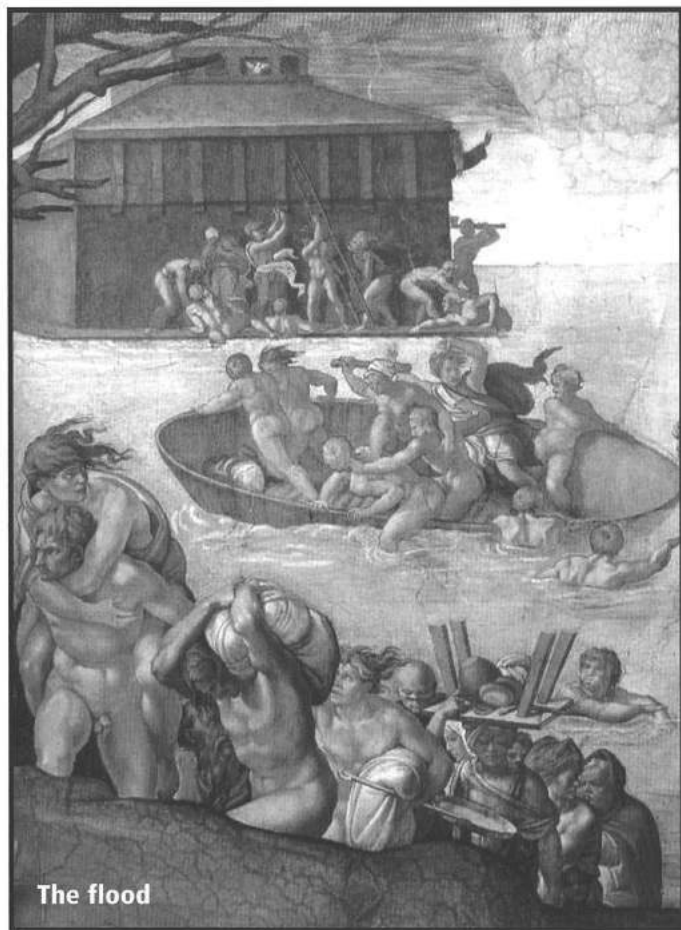
penned. Much of the saga of early Adventist amalgamation theory was documented by Gordon Shigley in a 1982 article in *Spectrum*. Most Adventists will, however, be unaware of the historical facts, which have been omitted or at best hastily glossed over in all official church publications from the 1940s up to the present. In the light of ongoing discussions within the church over questions of faith and science, as well as recent attempts by some Adventists to revive White’s amalgamation statements as a plausible scientific explanation for the origins of some predatory animals, it is important to revisit what she and the other pioneers of the church actually said on the subjects of race, science, origins, and the sin of “amalgamated” blood.

“Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast”: Ellen White’s Original Statements and Her Modern Apologists

After discussing various sins of the antediluvians, including polygamy and intermarriage between the righteous and the wicked, White proceeded in *Spiritual Gifts* to describe an additional evil that had “corrupted” humankind, resulting in God deciding to destroy the world in the flood:

But if there was one sin above any other which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere. God purposed to destroy by a flood that powerful, long-lived race that had corrupted their ways before him.¹

In the next chapter, White then offered additional commentary on the “base crime of amalgamation,” suggesting by any straightforward reading of her words that the sin had, in fact, continued even *after* the flood and had produced numerous species alive today that



The flood

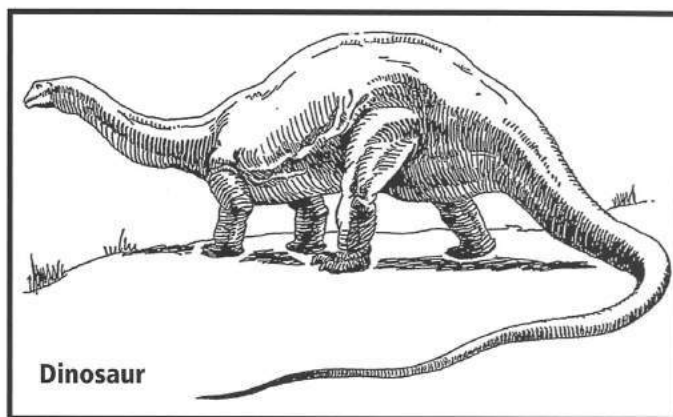
were not included in God's original creation, as well as "certain races of men."

Every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the Flood. Since the Flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.²

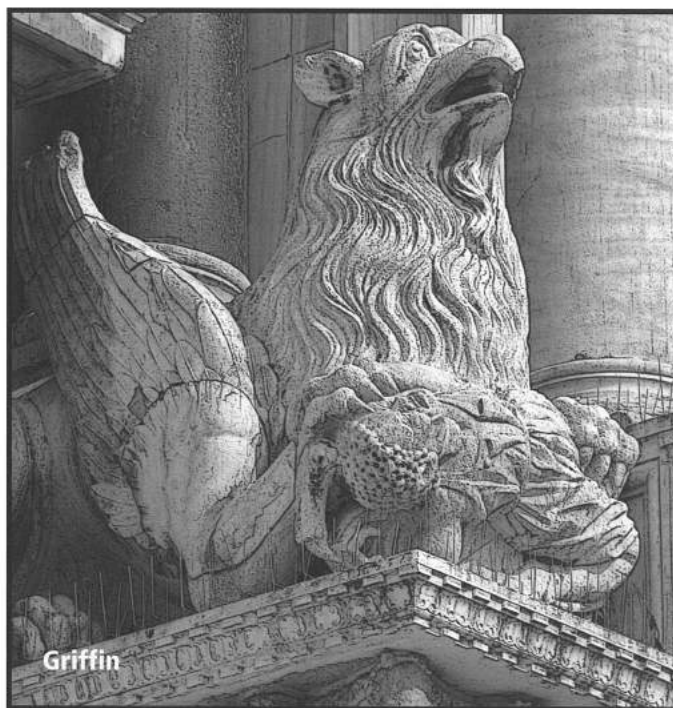
The de facto official Adventist interpretation of these passages from 1947 on (when church leaders convened an urgent meeting near San Francisco to listen to competing arguments from biologists Frank Marsh and Harold Clark on what to do with the scientifically and seemingly racially charged statements) was explained by F. D. Nichol in 1951 as follows: "When Mrs. White said, 'amalgamation of man and beast,' she meant (1) the amalgamation of [righteous and unrighteous] races of men, and (2) the amalgamation of species of animals. The first 'defaced the image of God,' the second 'caused confusion everywhere.'³

In his recent book, *Dinosaurs: An Adventist View*, self-publishing California lawyer David Read, whose ideas have been warmly endorsed by both past and present General Conference officials, supplements this explanation of White's words with a novel reading of his own of what she must have meant when she spoke not only of pre- but also of post-flood "amalgamation of man and beast." White "used the term amalgamation to describe all genetic recombinations, whether manipulated or natural," Read declares. "Post-Flood amalgamation was and is a natural process that was provided for by a benevolent Creator."⁴

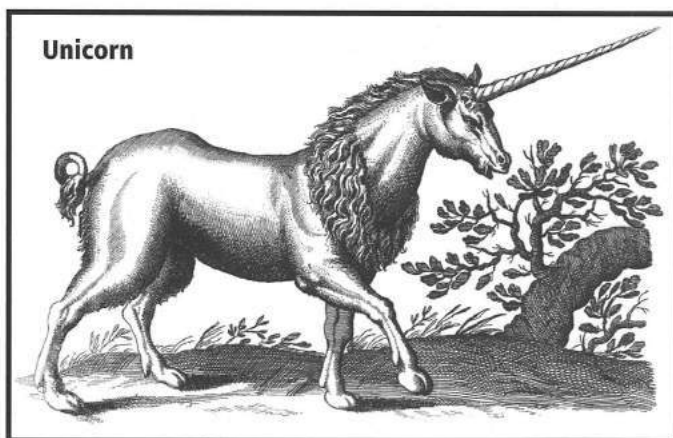
When White spoke of pre-flood amalgamations, Read meanwhile asserts, she was actually describing, under divine inspiration and using the best language available to her at the time, scientific facts that we are only now beginning to grasp, secret knowledge that even White herself could not comprehend but that Read believes we can now understand as a result of the discoveries of modern genetics. The antediluvians, he declares, possessed sophisticated technology (perhaps including "electron microscopes") much more powerful than anything we possess today, as well as superior knowledge of DNA and genetic engineering.⁵ Acting under demonic influence, the antediluvian scientists used their evil ingenuity to meld different species of animals, going so far as to com-



Dinosaur

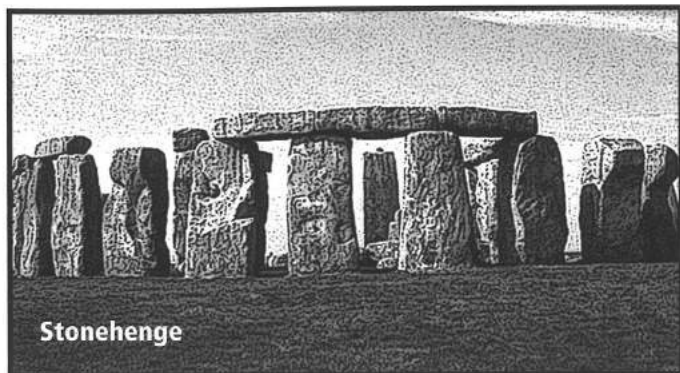


Griffin



Unicorn

bine human and animal DNA in advanced genetics laboratories to create the dinosaurs (for unclear reasons but perhaps, Read speculates, to fight in arenas for the amusement of human spectators). God then destroyed these amalgamated creatures in Noah's flood. The flood also



Stonehenge



Mermaid



Noah's family

destroyed the physical evidences of these facts, but we find clues to the existence of this hyper-advanced pre-flood civilization, Read maintains, in various statements by White and in unexplained mysteries of the ancient world such as the rock formations at Stonehenge, the prevalence of “amalgamated” beasts (including griffins, unicorns, and mermaids) in ancient stories and statuary, and Plato’s myth of the lost city of Atlantis.

According to Clifford Goldstein in a review of Read’s

book published by *Adventist Today*, this is the explanation for the dinosaurs that “still makes the best sense.”⁶ In its 2010 “Statement on the Biblical Doctrine of Creation,” the Theological Seminary at Andrews University cites Read’s book in its list of suggested readings.⁷ One of White’s statements on amalgamation was meanwhile quoted as a plausible theory for the origins of the dinosaurs in a glossy five-part series of creationist flyers used by Southern Adventist University to promote its biology department during the 2010 General Conference session in Atlanta, Georgia (albeit not the passage alluding to “certain races of men”). During the 2010 GC session, Director of the Geoscience Institute, James Gibson, also offered a lecture (sponsored by the General Conference as part of its daily “Yes, Creation!” series) on the origins of predatory animals in which he asserted, without direct appeal to White’s amalgamation passages, that the best Adventist explanation for at least some creatures in nature is that they are the genetically re-engineered creations of Satan (although Gibson offered no criterion for detecting demonic intelligent design in nature or distinguishing it from divine intelligent design).

White’s statements on “amalgamation,” Adventist neo-amalgamation theories therefore suggest, do not mean what they plainly appear to say. Rather, they refer to no less than three completely separate processes: 1) the satanically orchestrated pre-flood melding or hybridization of animals that produced the dinosaurs and other predators some time within the past 10,000 years (whether performed supernaturally by Satan himself, or in a naturalistically possible way by depraved human scientists using genetic engineering techniques we can barely fathom); 2) the satanically inspired pre- and post-flood intermarriage of righteous and wicked “races”; and 3) the providentially guided post-flood genetic adaptation of organisms and people to their environments (essentially theistic microevolution), including the value-neutral creation of diverse human races after Noah’s family left the ark. These ideas, in convoluted and not always logically consistent ways, continue to play an important role in Adventist thinking on questions of faith and science at popular as well as institutional and even academic levels (at least judging from their inclusion in Southern Adventist University’s current marketing materials and among the texts commended to Adventist readers by the Theological Seminary at Andrews University).

"It is impossible to tell where the human ends and the animal begins": Uriah Smith's Original Defense of White's Scientific Authority

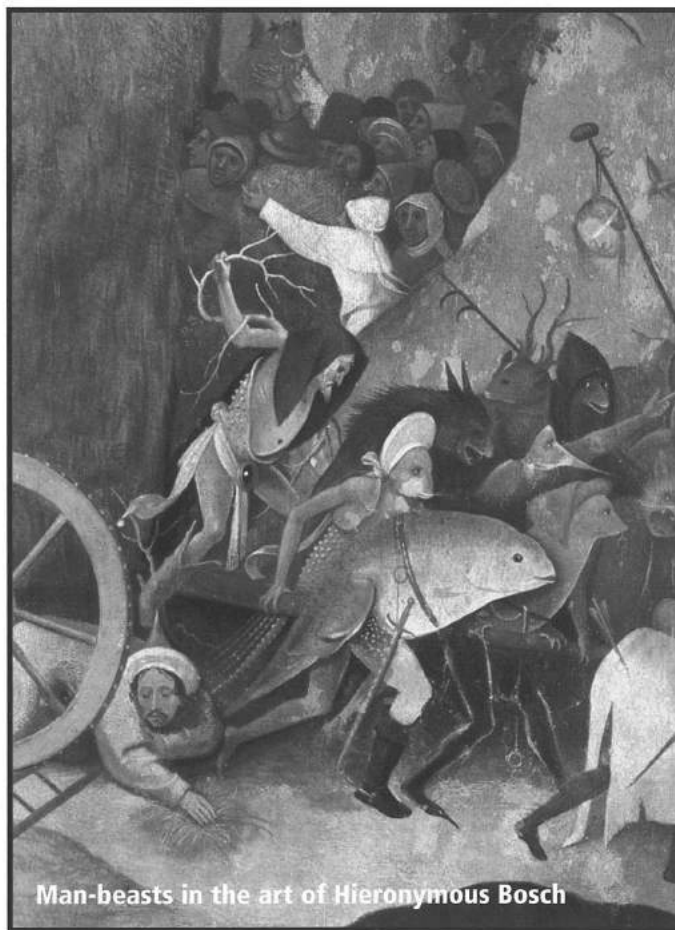
Yet even if we allow that White's statements on "amalgamation" are grammatically ambiguous and leave open the door to imaginative ad hoc interpretations such as these, these complex semantic arguments do not seriously wrestle with the question of what White's use of the phrase "amalgamation of man and beast" in conjunction with "races of men" would have conveyed to most of her readers in the context of American slavery and mid-nineteenth century race theory (the Civil War was still raging when her statements first appeared in print). Beyond the logical problem of interpreting "races of men" as referring to the origins of wicked and righteous people as in F.D. Nichol's apologetic construction (since wicked human beings are clearly assumed by White to be the *cause* and not the result of "the base crime of amalgamation," and since she had already mentioned intermarriage between the righteous and wicked in *Spiritual Gifts* as a separate and lesser sin), this is the question we must face: How was White understood by her readers at the time? And how did White respond, or not respond, to these interpretations? For Adventist scholars committed to rigorous methods of historical research as well as principles of reasonable inference from all of the available evidence, the answers to these questions will provide the most likely answer to the question of what White herself believed at the time.

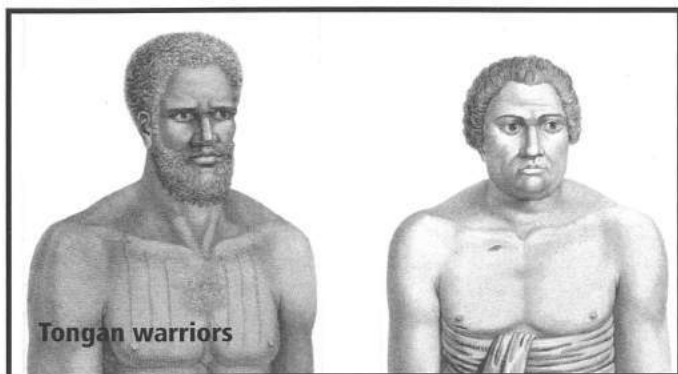
The most important primary source we have in this regard is an 1866 defense of White's prophetic gift written by Uriah Smith and published in serialized form in the fledgling denomination's weekly journal, the *Advent Review* and *Sabbath Herald*, of which Smith was the editor and James White the publisher at the time (hereafter *Review and Herald*). Smith's concern was to uphold White's authority and to counter various criticisms against her, including attacks by outsiders on her statements on amalgamation. He directly confronted her scientific detractors on the front page of the July 31 issue of the magazine beneath the title, "The Visions—Objections Answered."⁸

The charge being leveled against the early Adventists in general and White in particular in the light of her amalgamation claims was that they did not believe that "the negro race" was fully human. Smith vigorously fought back. He did so, however, not by advancing the

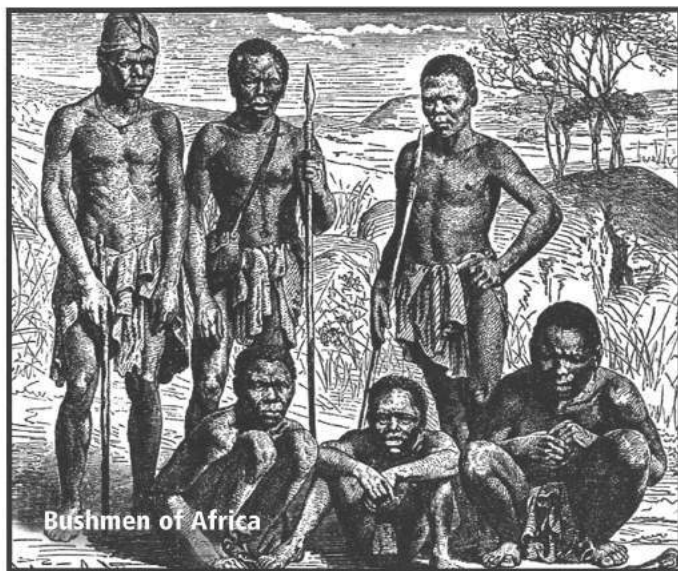
complex semantic arguments developed some 80 years later by Frank Marsh, F.D. Nichol, and subsequent generations of Adventists, nor by declaring unequivocally that African Americans are no less human than persons of European descent. Instead, Smith appealed to the findings of natural science and to common sense notions to validate White's words.

"But does any one deny the general statement [by Ellen White that 'amalgamation' had produced 'certain races of men']?" Smith writes. "If they did, they could easily be silenced by a reference to such cases as the wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country." The scientific evidence, he continues, supported beyond cavil White's view that some humans are more closely related to the rest of the animal kingdom than others. "The naturalists affirm that the line of demarcation between the human and animal races is lost in confusion. It is impossible, as they affirm, to tell just where the human ends and the animal begins. Can we suppose that this was so ordained of God in the beginning? Rather has not sin marred the boundaries of these two kingdoms?"

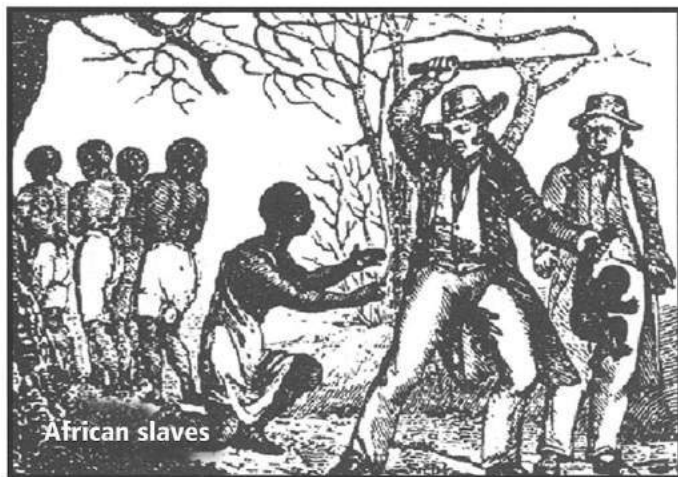




Tongan warriors



Bushmen of Africa



African slaves

Nevertheless, Smith argues, one could still legitimately speak of those races with “amalgamated blood” as being fully human since merely having “any of the original Adamic blood” in one’s veins was sufficient. It was not necessary “that God made every particle of blood that exists, in any human being,” Smith reasons, and amalgamated blood was to be viewed no differently than “all the scrofulous, leprous, or syphilitic blood that courses in the worst transgressor’s veins!”

Hence, no person in the present could be held morally accountable for “the ancient sin of amalgamation” that had produced the “certain races” White had spoken of. “Has any one a right to try to use it to their prejudice? By no means.” We “are to take all races and peoples as we find them,” Smith writes. “And those who manifest sufficient powers of mind to show that they are moral and accountable beings, are of course to be esteemed as objects of regard and philanthropic effort.” Christians had a duty to “labor for the improvement” of the lower races. “Whatever race of men we may take, Bushmen, Hottentots, Patagonians, or any class of people, however low they may apparently be in the scale of humanity, their mental capabilities are in every instance the basis on which we are to work, and by which we determine whether they are subjects of moral government or not.”

“The General and Michigan Conference Resolved”: The Church Endorses Smith’s Reading

The 1866 article was unsigned by Smith even though most articles from the period and in the July 31 issue included clear author attribution, hinting that it may have been intended as a declaration of the journal’s if not the Adventist church’s consensus understanding. But the evidence that Smith spoke not only for himself but also for a broader Adventist community is not merely circumstantial or stylistic. Careful readers of the journal would have discovered that Smith was the author of the “Objections Answered” articles from a brief note included at the back of the June 12 issue, which marked the start of the series. The note—which to my knowledge has not been discussed previously in any article dealing with the amalgamation problem—reads as follows:

It may be proper here to state that this manuscript [“Objections to the Visions”] was prepared before our late Conference; but its publication was withheld till it could be submitted to the ministering brethren who might then assemble, for them to decide upon its merits, and the disposition that should be made of it. It was examined by them, and received their approval, with a decision that it should be published.”

Most of the manuscript, the short notice continued, was in fact read aloud before a joint session of the General and Michigan State Conferences, leading to an official action by church leaders:

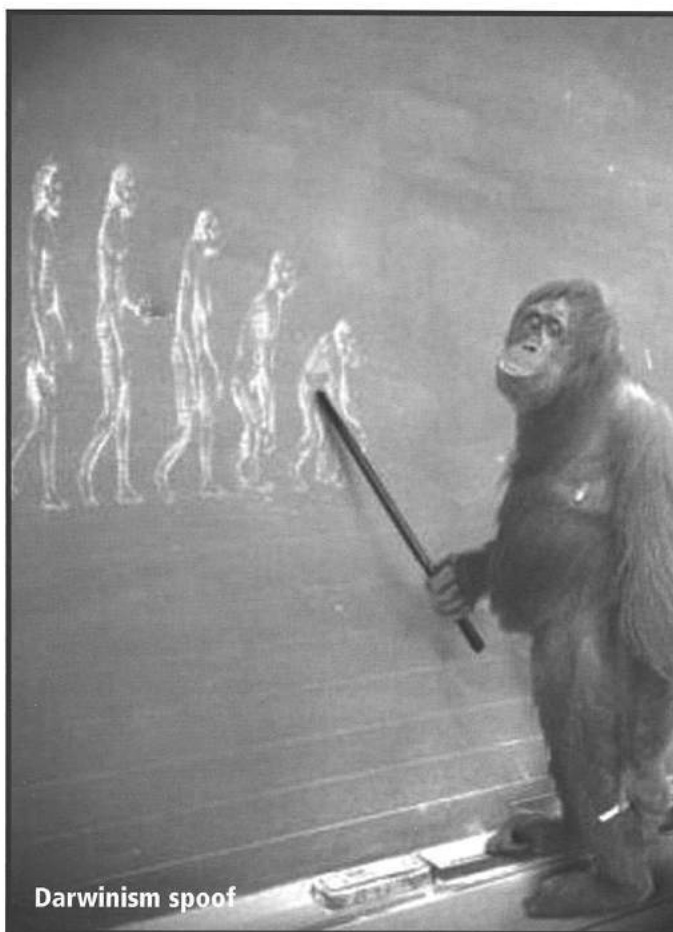
Resolved, *That we, the members of the General and Mich. State Conference, having heard a portion of the manuscript which has been prepared by Bro. U. Smith, in response to certain objections recently brought against the visions of Sister White, do hereby express our hearty approval of the same. Resolved, That we tender our thanks to Bro. Smith for his able defense of the visions against the attacks of their opponents.*¹⁰

The fact that the body that Ellen White described in 1875 as “the highest authority that God has on earth” passed a resolution of “hearty approval” for Smith’s manuscript and thanks for “his able defense of the visions”—including, by every indication, his race-based defense of amalgamation theory—poses a great challenge to Adventists today who might wish to minimize the importance of his words. Individuals, who are determined to stand for truth though the heavens fall, will not shrink, however, from openly and directly wrestling with these historical facts. Minimally, Smith’s article is clear evidence of the influence White’s statements on amalgamation had on the thinking of the other pioneers on questions of race, science, and origins. Smith’s words also remain the most important historical evidence we have as to what White herself believed and meant to convey in 1864.

Apologists for White’s amalgamation passages might nevertheless point to another important fact included in the notice cited above. As far as the prophetess herself was concerned, Smith and the other editors had pursued “no consultation whatever with Sister White, nor received any suggestion or explanation from her on any point.” Instead, they had prided themselves, they declared, in applying a common sense, plain reading approach to her writings. This approach was in principle open to all and was the same approach the early Adventists advocated for reading Scripture itself. “We take the visions as they are published, and base our explanation of any apparent discrepancy, on the language as it stands.”¹¹ The fact that a common sense, plain reading of White’s statements on amalgamation could lead early Adventists to views on race, origins, and science that (hopefully) all Adventists today would emphatically reject raises the question: is a common sense, plain reading of Scripture always the best approach to biblical hermeneutics? In any event, the possibility that White remained unaware of Uriah Smith’s interpretation of her words throughout her life, or that she disagreed with them, begs credulity in the light of later historical facts.

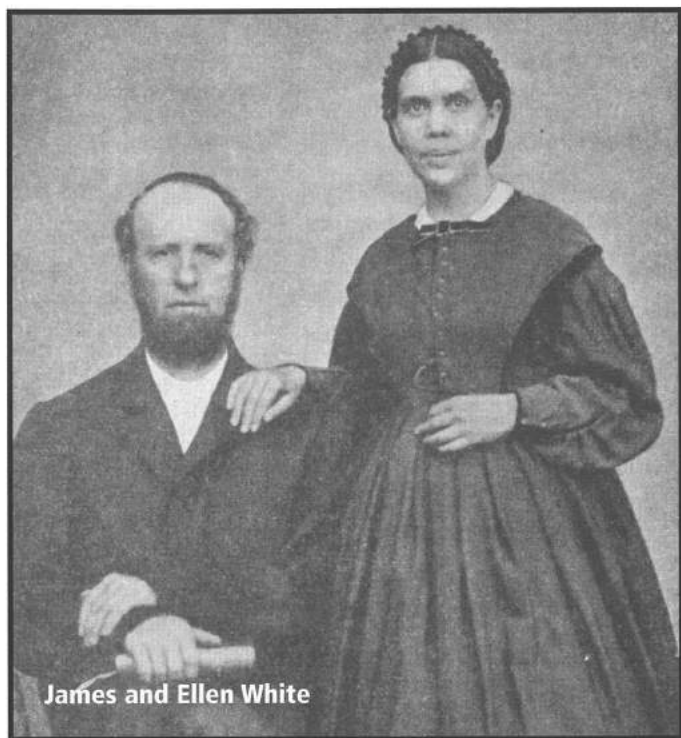
“The Elder Said Her Teachings Were Worse than Darwinism”: Holding Fast to the Proclamation of Animal-Human Amalgamations

Had Smith’s scientifically spurious and racially disturbing defense of White’s amalgamation passages only appeared in 1866, we might still have hoped that it was an embarrassing mistake by a single individual that was quickly forgotten if not rejected by the larger Adventist community and perhaps even corrected or silenced by White herself (the close reading and ringing endorsement that Smith had received for “Objections Answered” from the General Conference in session notwithstanding). But throughout Ellen White’s life, amalgamation remained a minor yet recurring theme of Adventist creation science, invariably presented in Smith’s racist terms. White did not offer any known objections, clarifications, or corrections to these declarations, which reappeared several times in the church’s official journal alongside articles she had written. And she maintained her silence despite the fact that the Adventist understanding of amalgamation theory that she had inspired was a source of both ongoing criticism from non-Adventists and ongoing public confidence among

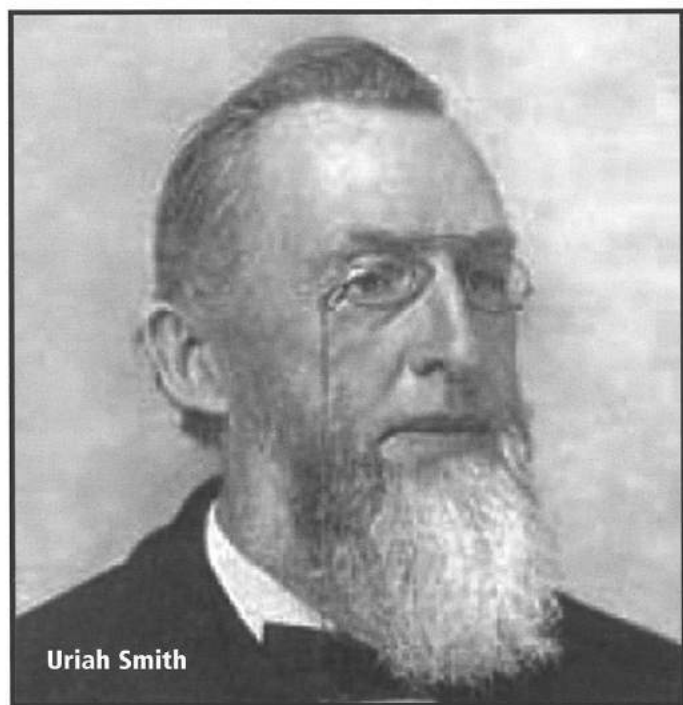


Darwinism spoof

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James and Ellen White



Uriah Smith

church members in her authority even on scientific matters. As tentative as any argument from silence must be, then, her silence was by every indication a form of tacit acceptance if not approval.

In 1868, two full years after his initial apology for White's inspiration in her amalgamation declarations first appeared in print, Smith's defense of amalgamation theory was published yet again in its entirety by the church as part of an evangelistic tract entitled *The Visions of Mrs. E.G.*

White: A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to Scripture.

James White offered a glowing review of the book for the *Review and Herald* beneath the heading, "New and Important Work." "While carefully reading the manuscript," he writes, "I felt very grateful to God that our people could have this able defense of those views which they so much love and prize, and which others despise and oppose. This book is designed for a very wide circulation."¹² Readers of the *Review and Herald* were encouraged to order *The Visions of Mrs. E.G. White* at a cost of 20 cents for the book and an additional 2 cents for postage. James and Ellen White, Shigley documented, personally distributed 2,000 copies of Smith's book—its race-centered defense of White's inspiration on the subject of amalgamation included—at campmeetings that year.¹³

In 1878, G. V. Kilgore describes in the pages of the *Review and Herald* how he had successfully vanquished several critics of Adventism in debate, including a Baptist minister who "said that what Sister White said about amalgamation of man and beast was utterly impossible. I referred him to Johnson's New Cyclopedia," Kilgore writes:

...that he might learn for the first time, if he never knew it before, that "Allied species are capable, as a rule, of pairing and producing offspring;" and that, "under the influence of man, mongrel races readily arise and are indefinitely sustained,"—just exactly what Sister White says. The elder said her teachings were worse than Darwinism. But I showed that her teachings were correct (Lev. 18:23, 24), and that his were worse than nonsense.¹⁴

(The Leviticus passage that Kilgore refers to is the prohibition in Mosaic Law on humans having "carnal relations with any beast.")

In 1901, the *Review and Herald* published (together with a front page article, "Judge Not," by Ellen White) a letter from a concerned Adventist asking the question, "Can amalgamated blood be saved?" The editors (now Alonzo T. Jones and Uriah Smith) replied that persons with amalgamated blood were certainly not beyond salvation and further that the amalgamation spoken of by Sister White did not "violate or invalidate physiological law." The difficulty was that science showed that hybridized creatures, such as mules, were infertile and could not perpetuate their species. However, they continued, "might it not be that sufficient results of bestiality would appear as to leave a trace of amalgamation, without destroying the power of

generation?" The amalgamation spoken of by White "is seen in what is called certain 'races of men.' This shows that deterioration was not recognized to such a degree as to eliminate the human and transform any such offspring into beasts" (emphasis in the original).¹⁵

In so many words, the flagship journal of the Adventist church at the turn of the century was simply upholding the church's long-held understanding based upon White's statements and Smith's vigorous if not authoritative interpretation and defense of them nearly four decades earlier. The assurance offered to concerned members in 1901 as in the 1860s was: 1) that White spoke authoritatively not only on religious but also on scientific matters; and 2) that amalgamated persons might still qualify as human beings and subjects of philanthropic concern so long as they had at least some of Adam's blood in their veins, regardless of whether or not that blood had been tainted in the ancient past with the blood of animals.

At the same time, the 1901 article seems to reflect a growing concern for the scientific difficulties posed by White's statements and an attempt to couch the idea of amalgamation in more convincing scientific language. This coincides historically with the birth of modern genetics, which Adventists may by then have had an uncomfortable and growing awareness of. One year before, the experiments of Augustinian priest and scientist Gregor Mendel had been rediscovered and independently confirmed by Hugo de Vries and Carl Correns. Mendel's groundbreaking 1866 paper, "Experiments on Plant Hybridization," was translated into English in 1901 for the first time.

But the fact that some races were degraded or "lower" than others, as White had alluded and as Smith had plainly declared, was still taken as self-evident by most Adventists, as it was by most Americans and Europeans of their day. The Hottentots of Southern Africa, who Smith had cited as quintessential examples of "amalgamated" beings, were the subjects of some particularly sensational commentary in the *Review and Herald* throughout the nineteenth century. In 1861 John N. Loughborough quotes Benjamin Franklin saying that Hottentot men prove their manhood by beating their mothers. This illustrated, according to Loughborough, that those who "follow nature as a guide" in reality "follow self," which was the source of their "gross errors, and wickedness."¹⁶ In 1868, the magazine reported (to illustrate a Bible verse) that the

Hottentots' way of drinking was by stooping down and lapping up water like "dogs."¹⁷ In 1890, the journal wrote that Hottentots are "excessively dirty, lazy, and gluttonous." Its women "are especially ugly," the article continued. "They besmeared themselves with grease, which, when the sun was hot, trickled down their naked skin."¹⁸ In 1891, the magazine informed its readers that the Hottentots believe themselves to have been long ago "cursed" by God and that more than other tribes they tend to inexplicably lapse back into heathenism even after being educated by Europeans and baptized into the civilizing Christian faith.¹⁹

"We must not carry things to extremes:" The Racial Conservatism of the Pioneers

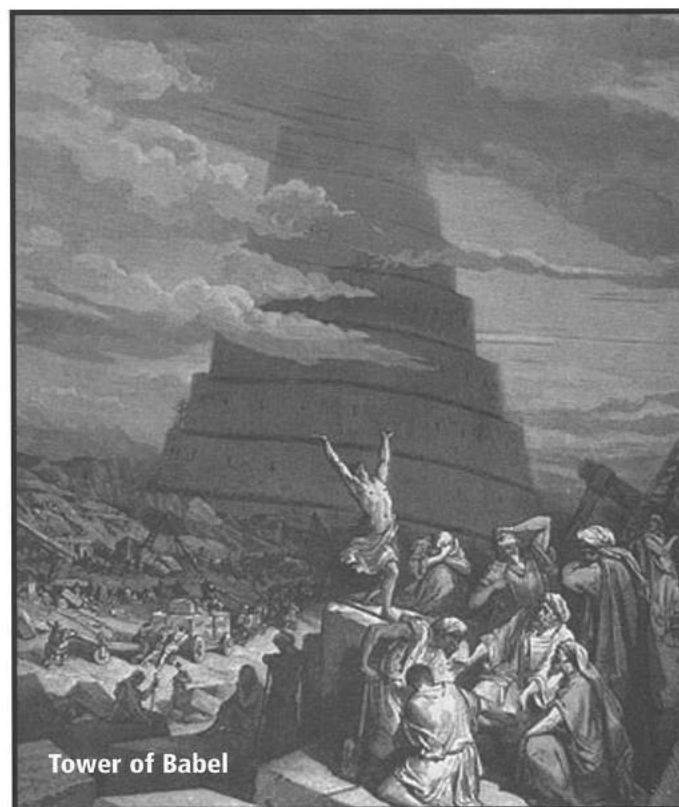
These facts should not be taken as evidence that Smith, White, or the other Adventist pioneers were racists within the spectrum of widely held racial views of their time. It is important to note that amalgamation theory played no central role in White's theology or in her later writings on Genesis. Many early Adventists (including most notably Joseph Bates) were deeply sympathetic to the abolitionist movement. They leaned toward radical egalitarian thinking. There was no place within Adventism, White declares in 1863, for individuals with pro-slavery views. "We must let it be known that we have no such ones in our fellow-



A sterile mule



Hottentot



Tower of Babel

ship, that we will not walk with them in church capacity."²⁰ White went even further, endorsing defiance of a Federal statute, the Fugitive Slave Law, which required Northerners to hand escaped slaves back to their owners. "When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God," she declares, "we are to obey the latter."²¹

In 1867, one year before Smith published his defense of White's words on amalgamation, Tennessee clergymen Buckner H. Payne published (under the pseudonym "Ariel") the second edition of his book, *The Negro: What is His Ethnological Status?* (I have not been able to discover when the first edition appeared, whether before or after *Spiritual Gifts*.) Payne uses a vocabulary of "crime" and "confusion" very close to White's to explain Noah's flood. God could not tolerate "the crime of amalgamation," Payne writes, that is, the sin of "association with beasts" that had produced various races. "For this crime God had destroyed the world, sown confusion broadcast at Babel," he declares. "It is a crime that God has never forgiven, never will forgive, nor can it be propitiated by all the sacrifices earth can make or give." But whereas Uriah Smith argues in defense of White's prophetic authority that amalgamated blood is no worse than the blood of any sinner and that Christians must "labor for the improvement" of the "lower races," Payne heaps vile abuse on those working to raise the political and social standing of African Americans. "The states or people that favor this equality... God will exterminate," he says. "You cannot elevate a beast to the level of a son of God."²²

When placed alongside Payne's racist screed, some might argue, Smith's defense of White's statements on amalgamation thus represented a significant advance in racial thinking for the time. For one thing, Payne does not assume that animal-human amalgamations produced African Americans. He assumes that blacks were created "beasts" to begin with, so that black-white "amalgamations" were in fact the original animal-human amalgamations. Payne's use of the term "amalgamation" should dispense once and for all with F. D. Nichol's claim (repeated by a number of Adventist writers since) that in mid-nineteenth century America the word was not used to describe animal-human combinations. It clearly was. This is precisely why White was immediately understood by both her critics as well as Smith to be saying that racial differentiation was the result of animal-human hybridizations. It is nevertheless significant that Smith, in

contrast to Payne, viewed non-European races as the corrupted products of animal-human relations but as *humans* nonetheless. Does this not show that the Adventist pioneers were ahead of the rest of the country on questions of racial equality in their day?

Such a reading of early Adventism would, unfortunately, be historically misleading. Although White and the other Adventist leaders, as good New England Yankees, held progressive views on race and condemned the sin of slavery in ways that all Adventists can celebrate as a vital part of our heritage, they were not collectively as radical or forthright in their defense of racial equality as William Lloyd Garrison and others who most courageously championed the abolitionist cause as a matter of religious duty. Garrison, who was also a devout Christian, had been arguing for complete political and biological equality of the races from the 1830s on, going so far as to publicly burn a copy of the U.S. Constitution to protest its pro-slavery provisions during an abolitionist rally that included Henry David Thoreau and Sojourner Truth as speakers. But prophetic action for racial justice, especially after the Civil War ended, was typically subordinated by White and the other pioneers, Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart document, to advancing “the work”—that is, to recruiting and baptizing more members without challenging America’s racist social order.²³

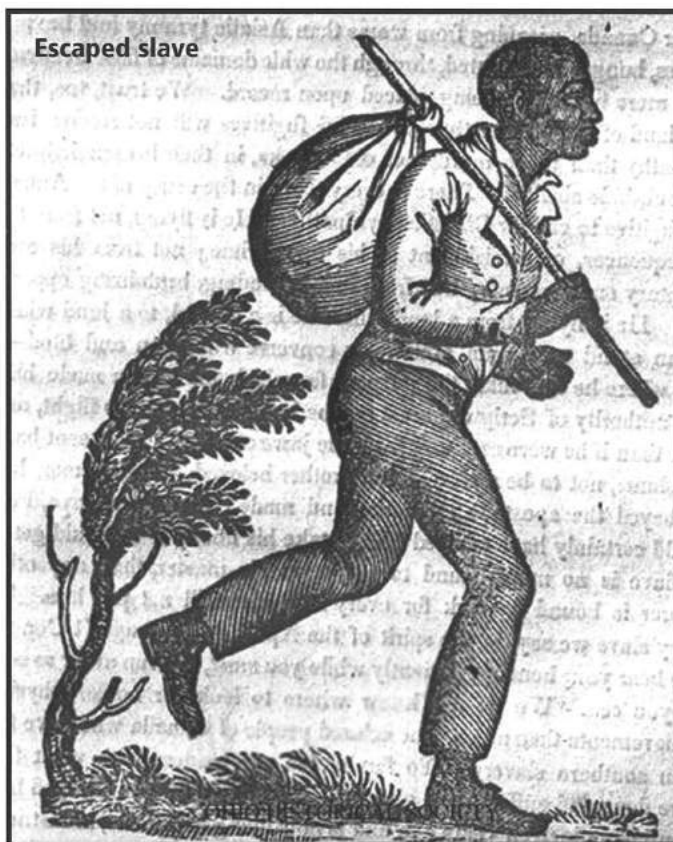
On more than one occasion, for example, White spoke against interracial marriage on the grounds that it would be cruel to produce mixed-race children but more importantly would sow controversy and “confusion,” distracting from evangelizing efforts. In an 1891 speech to church leaders at Battle Creek, she spoke strongly against discrimination and urged churches to open their doors to all races. “At the same time,” she declared, “we must not carry things to extremes and run into fanaticism on this question. Some would think it right to throw down every partition wall and intermarry with the colored people, but this is not the right thing to teach or to practice.”²⁴

In a series of 1970 articles in the *Review and Herald*, Roy Branson (relying primarily on research by Ron Graybill) argues that White’s more uncomfortably segregationist statements were made not only out of pragmatic concern for church growth but out of concern for the safety of African Americans themselves in response to “the Crisis of the Nineties,” in which newly converted black Adventists in the South faced angry white lynch mobs. White

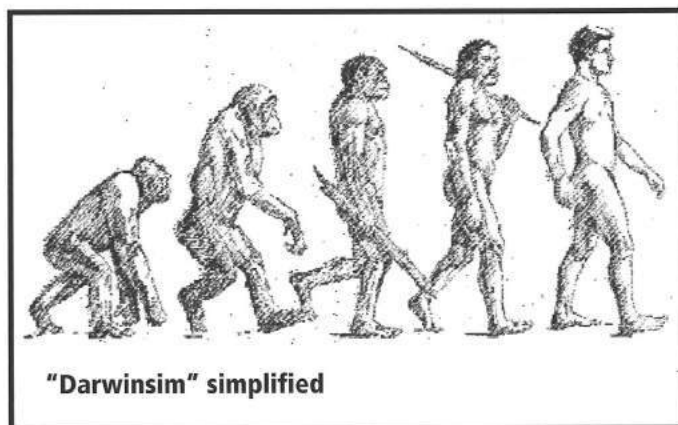
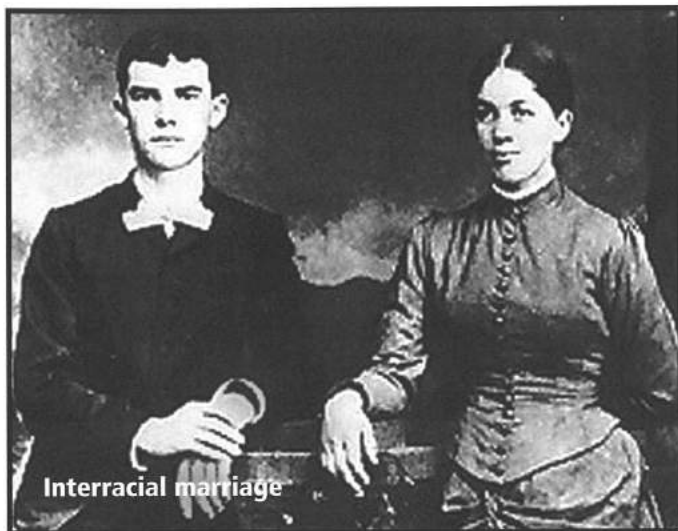
endorsed separation of the races, Branson writes, as a provisional move to protect believers from physical harm.²⁵ Yet the Crisis of the Nineties had not yet begun when White made the statement quoted above against interracial marriage. It would in fact be another three years before Edson White sailed down the Mississippi on the *Morning Star* to evangelize among African Americans in the South. But by 1894 there were still only 50 baptized African American church members.²⁶

And as late as 1912—three years after her then home state of California had expanded its “miscegenation” laws to prohibit marriages of whites with persons of Japanese descent (in addition to blacks and “Mongolians”)—White repeated her opposition to interracial marriage as a source of “confusion” and obstacle to the spread of the Gospel. “No encouragement to marriages of this character should be given among our people,” she writes:

Let the colored brother enter into marriage with a colored sister who is worthy, one who loves God, and keeps His commandments. Let the white sister who contemplates uniting in marriage with the colored brother refuse to take this step, for the Lord is not leading in this direction. . . . The taking of such a step will create confusion and hindrance. It will not be for the advancement of the work or for the glory of God.²⁷



FROM THE NEW YORK PAPER, THE ANTI-SLAVERY RECORD, IN JULY 1837



Here, by contrast, is what Garrison—sounding much more like the prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—says, in the face of constant threats to his life, during his 1831 campaign more than nine decades earlier to repeal laws barring interracial marriage:

*If He [God] has “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” then they are one species, and stand on a perfect equality; their intermarriage is neither unnatural nor repugnant to nature, but obviously proper and salutary; it being designed to unite people of different tribes and nations. . . . Come, thou sagacious discriminator of skins, define thy boundary line! Let us know the exact shade and particular curl of the hair which justly deprive a man of his right of choice!*²⁸

“Lost in the Forests Dank: Apes Are Degenerate or Hybridized Men”: The Legacy of Early Adventist Amalgamation Theory

Tragically, Shigley as well as Ronald Numbers show, the view that African Americans and other races were the result of animal-human amalgamations remained perhaps the dominant Adventist view well into the twentieth cen-

tury. In 1931, George McCready Price, concerned that White’s statements on amalgamation were appearing less and less scientifically plausible, first proposed inserting the word “of” into the vexing passage to indicate that two separate “amalgamations” had occurred: “Since the flood, there has been amalgamation of man and (of) beast.” His suggestion provoked a storm of criticism. D. E. Robinson, who had been White’s personal secretary for many years, pointed out that Price’s reading did violence to the plain, literal meaning of the passage when read in context, went against what Adventists had long believed, and failed to provide a suitable Adventist explanation *for the clear evidences of common ancestry*. “Mrs. White’s statement, if accepted, will solve the problems connected with the close physical resemblance between man and some of the apes,” Robinson declares. “Anyone who observes the chimpanzee, the gorilla, or the orang, would not find it difficult to believe that they have common ancestry with the human race.”²⁹

In fact, Price himself—the founder of Adventist creation science—does not seem to have had any strong objections to the view that some humans might be the close relatives of primates. He could find “no clear and positive evidences from paleontology” that apes existed before the flood. Present day “anthropoid apes may be just as much a product of modern conditions as are the Negroid or the Mongolian types of mankind,” he writes in *The Phantom of Organic Evolution* in 1924. It was entirely possible (though not certain), he speculates, that “apes are degenerate or hybridized men” with “the Negroid” being an intermediate species or link between them.³⁰ Price’s preferred explanation of the origins of the races places greater emphasis, however (following Lamarkian evolutionary theories), on the role of the environment and “soft inheritance.” This, in any case, is the picture he conveys in following rhyme, which he penned to explain where “the Negroid” came from:

*The poor little fellow who went to the south
Got lost in the forests dank;
His skin grew black, as the fierce sun beat
And scorched his hair with its tropic heat,
And his mind became a blank.*³¹

Arguably the most traditional, orthodox, and literalistic Seventh-day Adventist approach to questions of origins thus includes the idea that humans and apes might very well share common ancestry—provided only that the ape

is seen to have devolved or “degenerated” from the human and not the other way around. If an unbroken sequence of fossils were ever discovered linking humans and chimpanzees, this would simply confirm what Uriah Smith, D. E. Robinson, and George McCready Price took to be a scientific fact: that (in Smith’s words) “It is impossible to tell just where the human ends and the animal begins.” And they took this belief from their understanding of the clear scientific evidences for organic evolution, which they did not deny but instead reinterpreted through the lens of White’s writings as well as their own assumptions about the first verses of the book of Genesis.

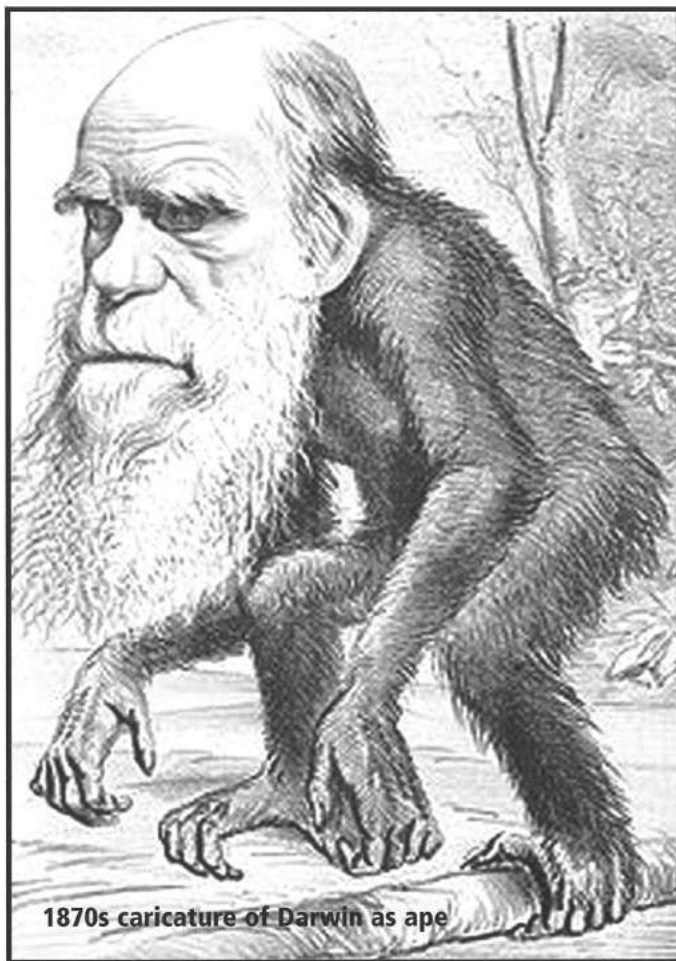
Early Adventist amalgamation theory—offered in enthusiastic support of biblical truth, doctrinal purity, Ellen White’s prophetic authority, creation science, and literalistic hermeneutics—may therefore help, at least partially, to explain other uncomfortable facts of Adventist history. For example, why in 1944 a black woman, Lucy Byard, was turned away from Washington Sanitarium for the color of her skin, dying as a result.³² Or why the General Conference cafeteria remained racially segregated until at least 1957.³³ Or why four Adventist students were reprimanded by the administration of Pacific Union College in 1965 (which had racially segregated dorms) for having marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama.³⁴ Or why the North American Division’s 1977 *Manual for Ministers* advised against marriages where “there are different racial backgrounds” (counsel that was only removed in 1992).³⁵

The major American prophet of the nineteenth century on the sin of racial injustice was in fact not White but Garrison, who did more than any other single individual (historian Henry Mayer compellingly shows)³⁶ to force the slavery issue into the national consciousness, who warned in inspired language that if justice was not done a bloody conflict would unfold, and who proclaimed God’s righteous judgment against all forms of oppression and discrimination. Nor, it must be said, was the prophetic community on matters of race and social justice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was, if anyone, the Quakers, who pushed aggressively for integration of schools in the South, fought against employment discrimination, and in 1947 won the Nobel Peace Prize for their significant peacemaking and reconciliation efforts around the world (despite there being only 150,000 Quakers at the time, in contrast to the Adventist church’s by then half million members).

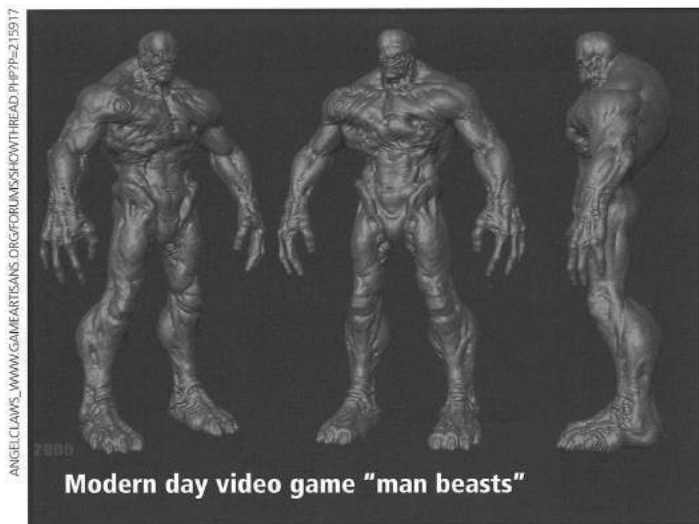
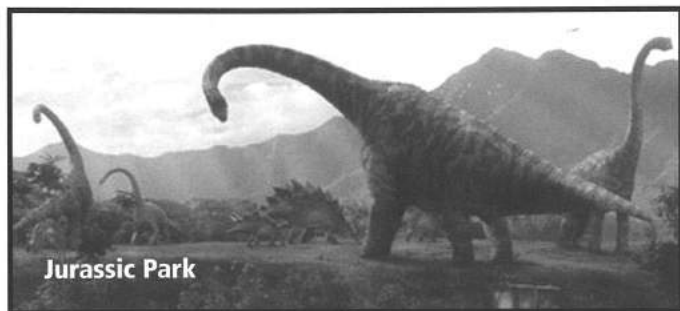
“Words Were Presented to Me as if Written With a Pen of Fire”: Did White’s Thinking Change?

For some, these facts can only mean one of two things: either we must develop ever more complex semantic and “scientific” arguments to defend the absolute authority of White and the infallibility of the Adventist Church on questions of origins, even in the face of a great deal of countervailing evidence and the often troubling history of the very human movement White helped to create. Or we must be “intellectually honest,” condemn White as charlatan and Adventism as a heresy, and leave the church. But are these really our only options?

White’s 1864 statements on “amalgamation” were republished in the 1871 version of *The Great Controversy* but were omitted from the 1890 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, most likely by White herself. In 1947, the Ellen G. White Publications editors removed the statements as well as surrounding sentences from *The Story of Redemption*. David Read suggests that White dropped the lines in 1890 because she sensed that the world was not yet ready for their deeper, hidden truth, which she too could barely



1870s caricature of Darwin as ape



fathom. Amalgamation theory needed to lie dormant until modern genetics and “Jurassic Park” arrived and self-described conservative or “historic Adventists” (see also Russell and Colin Standish³⁷) could decipher White’s words for us and for her, upholding her prophetic authority for a new generation of Adventists just as Uriah Smith did during White’s own lifetime by appealing to the new discoveries of natural science.

But there is another possibility that Adventists who think that the weight of the scientific as well as historical evidence really does matter for how we approach questions of origins must consider: White was wrong. Her words on amalgamation were not a prophetic vision of future events that would only become clear as those events unfolded. They were an interpretation of events in the past that were by every indication influenced by scientifically, theologically, morally, and racially dubious ideas that were already in circulation in her day. The prophet was not infallible; she did not write in a historical or cultural vacuum; she borrowed extensively from other writers; and the Adventist Church does not (at least officially) accept the idea of inerrant verbal inspiration. With the increasing digitization of libraries and old manuscripts it may only be a matter of time before we discover an ear-

lier source that was being circulated in the libraries of the pioneers in the 1850s and 1860s with precise parallel language to White’s 1864 amalgamation passages and with clearly racial intentions. And White might well have left the amalgamation statements out of *Patriarchs and Prophets* in 1890 not because they needed to wait another 120 years for interpreters with greater scientific knowledge than she possessed to penetrate their secret, hidden meaning, but because she herself had grown uneasy with her earlier assumptions and language.

In the same 1891 speech quoted above in which White opposed interracial marriage, she also offers these startling words: “While at St. Louis a year ago, as I knelt in prayer, these words were presented to me as if written with a pen of fire: ‘All ye are brethren.’...The color of the skin does not determine character in the heavenly courts...All are one in Christ. Birth, station, nationality, or color cannot elevate or degrade men.”³⁸ The reason these words are startling is not simply because of the force and immediacy of the vision she reported, but because of what they reveal to us about White’s ongoing moral and spiritual development and complex psychology as a human being and religious thinker. The fact that White was on her knees, in prayer, and wrestling with questions of racial inequality in 1890 (around the same time *Patriarchs and Prophets*, with its introduction by Uriah Smith, first saw print) suggests that it was something she was continuing to grapple with in important ways nearly three decades after her amalgamation statements were first published. But why would God have so dramatically impressed on her mind in 1890 (“as if written with a pen of fire”) the fact that “color cannot elevate or degrade men,” if she already fully and unwaveringly understood this fact and its significance for the Adventist community through her entire adult life?

White’s words in 1864, and again in 1890, were, it seems to this reader, the words of a woman struggling to hear God speaking in a particular time and place. And God did speak to Ellen White. But White’s words are not the secret codes of an inerrant oracle. We must dispense once and for all with the Gnostic view of prophecy that continues to consume many Adventists and that turns White into a nineteenth-century version of Nostradamus: an inexhaustible and infallible cipher who we can mine for answers to all of our scientific and theological dilemmas in the hopes of maintaining doctrinal purity or gain-

ing esoteric knowledge of the mysteries of good and evil so as to navigate a doomed planet and the challenges of modernity as the vanguard of the millennium.

White may not have said all that we would have liked her to say on the subjects of race and science, and she said some things one wishes she hadn't. The result for the Adventist community is a decidedly mixed and morally ambiguous record on racial equality—a legacy we still feel up to the present. But White too had a message from God, and she was willing to change—and did change—as God continued to wrestle with her heart. This human development (which was not always forward and upward, at least judging from some of her more uncomfortable statements against interracial marriage in the final years of her life in contrast to the young Ellen's more courageous statements against slavery) is also part of White's gift to the Adventist church. It is a reminder that God has always worked with human vessels in the particularities of their fallen cultures, languages, histories, psychologies, and life experiences. White achieved something beautiful for God: a movement committed to a ministry of healing, to the faith of Jesus and the commandments of God, and to the message of Christ's soon return. It is these core beliefs that are the heart of Adventist belief and practice. But there is no reason, in the light of what we know today both about science and about history, why we should continue to defend, let alone revive, her statements on amalgamation in 1864 in order to answer pressing scientific and theological questions of origins in the present.

I conclude with a normative recommendation for church leaders and Adventist educators: early Adventist amalgamation theory should be taught to Adventist college students in courses dealing with the intersection of faith, science, and origins. It should be taught not as theology or as science, however, but as nineteenth-century American and Adventist social history, with all of the relevant information surrounding White's statements clearly on the table for students to wrestle with and critically evaluate for themselves. This is what it means, I would suggest, to help young Adventists become thinkers and not mere reflectors of other people's thoughts. Unfortunately, fostering critical thinking and honest reflection on our complex past and the meaning of Adventist identity in the present has not always been the clear goal of Adventist writers keen to uphold White's prophetic inspiration. Uriah Smith's defense of White's amalgamation statements was mysteriously alluded to by Nichol

in 1951 in *Ellen White and Her Critics*, but without any analysis, explanation, or quotation. I can find no mention of Smith's words on the amalgamation issue in any of the numerous volumes on early Adventist history written by George Knight. It is not included among the searchable online documents of the White Estate. Nor is Smith mentioned by Herbert Douglas in his discussion of the amalgamation problem in his 1998 biography of White, *Messenger of the Lord*. Read includes a very short reference to Smith in an endnote to his book (with citation to Shigley's 1982 article), but only by way of dismissal as an example of the kind of reading of White the prophet herself would surely have opposed. Yet the weight of the historical evidence points in exactly the opposite direction. White did not oppose Smith's defense of her words, which she would most certainly have been aware of. This is precisely why his reading persisted as the *only* Adventist reading until well after White's death.

Distressing as these facts might be for Adventists who subscribe to basically inerrantist understandings of White's inspiration, those guardians of the Truth who would shield the Adventist community from difficult historical or scientific facts, no matter how well-meaning they might be, are not providing creative or faith-building answers for young adults who care deeply about their church and who are also committed to a serious discipleship of the mind. An authentic and profound fideism, by contrast, insists that we must face intellectual problems as *real problems*, not to be apologetically explained away, minimized, denied, ignored, quietly suppressed, or summarily dismissed by way of appeal to the correct biblical verse or Ellen White quotation. Those who would have

Continued on page 62...



Ellen the prophet

us deal with scientific, religious, and historical challenges in this way in the name of simple "faith" are in fact setting us all up for disillusionment and despair by placing White on a precarious if not idolatrous pedestal from which she is bound to fall the moment we honestly face the stubborn, complex, and frequently perplexing realities of life. But facing these realities without fear or prevarication is precisely what the life of faith in Christ within Adventist community now requires. ■

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